



PHOTO: BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Lewiston Dam on the Trinity River. Salmon and steelhead stocks declined by 90% after water diversions to Central Valley irrigators began.

Klamath and Trinity Rivers Basin



The Setting

The Klamath and Trinity rivers basin includes the Shasta, Scott, Salmon and Trinity rivers, and over 200 smaller feeder streams. The basin drains a vast region of southern Oregon and northwestern California. This area is the state's top steelhead region. After the Sacramento, this is also California's second most important salmon-producing river.

The Problems

Consistent with statewide trends, salmon and steelhead spawning runs in the Klamath

River basin have varied widely in recent years in response to both natural and human-caused environmental factors. King salmon runs entering this huge watershed's estuary have been as low as 25,000 and as high as the estimated run of 190,000 in 1987.

Dams block home streams

Natural spawning migrations up the main Klamath River are blocked by the Iron Gate hydroelectric dam a few miles south of the Oregon border. A mitigation hatchery there produces king salmon, silver salmon and steelhead trout.

On the Trinity River, spawners reach the end of the line at Lewiston Dam. This facility was built by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

in 1963 to divert 90% of the Trinity's stream flow to Central Valley Project irrigators. Not surprisingly, the Trinity River's salmon and steelhead stocks declined by 90% after these diversions began. The mitigation hatchery below the dam can not even begin to make up for these losses. In 1981, the U.S. Secretary of Interior ordered Trinity River diversions reduced by 219,500 acre-feet until a state-federal study team determined the amount of stream flow needed for rebuilding the area's salmon and steelhead runs. The study should be completed by 1993.

Silt and politics smother restoration efforts

Trinity River fish restoration efforts have been confounded by two factors -one physical, the other political. Many of the river's best spawning gravels have been smothered by silt. Stream flow has been so low since the construction of Trinity Dam that it has failed to move the silt downstream. To make matters worse, willows and other riparian plants have encroached on the silt beds, held them in place and, in this way, have further diminished the extent of the spawning gravels. The stream flow increases that have occurred since 1981 have yielded steady improvements in the spawning runs; however, the physical damage caused by 18 years of Central Valley Project diversions will take many years to overcome. Restoration will be costly and financial responsibility for the problems on the Trinity River clearly rests with those who benefit from the Central Valley Project.

The second matter clouding Trinity River fish conservation involves the water which the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has returned" to the river for the duration of the stream flow studies slated for completion by

1993. Despite repeated protests by fish conservation interests, the Bureau continues, as a matter of policy, to include the 219,500 acre-feet of water among its inventory of "uncommitted" Central Valley Project yield. The Bureau is offering the water for sale to Central Valley irrigation districts at the very time its need for fish restoration is being established by state and federal scientists!

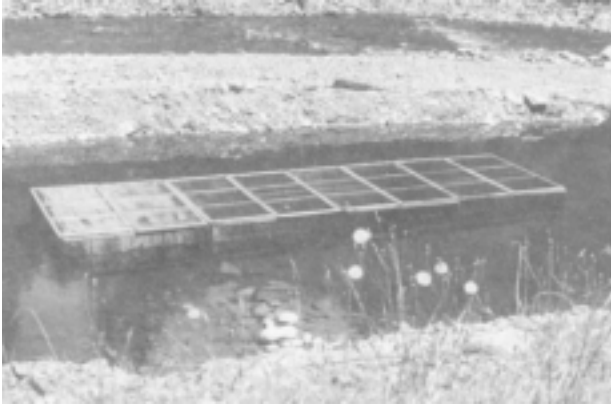
This inexplicable and contradictory behavior prompted the Advisory Committee to request the introduction of California Senate Joint Resolution 43 in 1988. The resolution asks the President and Congress of the United States to restrain the federal Bureau of Reclamation from marketing Central Valley Project water until after the stream flow needs of salmon and steelhead trout have been set and met.

Restoration efforts boosted by new funds

The majority of the Klamath River watershed is managed for timber production by private and federal agencies. The hillsides are steep, rainfall is abundant and erosion problems are persistent. In recent years, the U.S. Forest Service has shown genuine interest in watershed and fisheries restoration opportunities. Projects throughout the watershed, involving not only the land management agencies, but the Department of Fish and Game, angler organizations, Native American groups and commercial fishermen, have demonstrated that the region's salmon and steelhead stocks can be substantially restored with cost-effective methods.

Encouraged by these local initiatives, Congress enacted the Klamath and Trinity River Basins Fisheries Restoration Act (Public Law 99-552) in 1986. The Act authorizes a \$20 million, 20-year federal government effort to

"...the dramatic decline of the salmon and steelhead fisheries is testimony of a system that is out of balance..."



PHOTOS: HUPA VALLEY TRIBE

*TOP: The region's Indians are involved with restocking projects.
CENTER AND BOTTOM: Salmon are raised and eventually
planted in the Klamath River.*

"When salmon and steelhead survival is threatened, other values important to all Californians are at risk, too..."

restore the watershed's salmonid fisheries. The State of California has promised to match the federal effort - providing a total of \$40 million for the duration of the program.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has established a new fisheries restoration project office in Yreka and has requested its first \$1 million appropriation for the fiscal year beginning October, 1988. The U.S. Secretary of Interior's guidelines for the state's matching commitment will be available soon. The Director of the Department of Fish and Game assured the Legislature in 1987 that the State Administration will budget whatever funds are required to assure success of the Klamath basin program.

Native American interests in the fishery

There is an urgent need for fisheries restoration in the Klamath River basin. The salmon of the Klamath River are harvested not only by California and Oregon commercial trollers and anglers, but also by members of the region's three indigenous Native American communities: Hupa, Karuk and Yurok Indians. The allocation of Klamath River fish between California and Oregon interests - and among anglers, commercial trollers and Indians - is made by the federal Pacific Fisheries Management Council.

The degradation of fish habitat in the basin has contributed to large variations in the size of spawning runs. The variations increase the difficulty of estimating the size of the region's

total salmon population; these estimates are the basis upon which the Council determines how many fish may be harvested by each of the two states and the three user groups. Uncertainty over the estimates and how they will influence each year's allocation makes the livelihoods of fishermen and the area's recreational economy uncertain; it also increases tensions between the user groups.

As California's salmon resources dwindled during this century, the state gradually restricted their harvest in the state's rivers to recreational fishing only. An exception has been made for the Klamath area Indians, providing for their use of gill nets in the river, because of special rights accorded them. During the past 15 years, the courts have clarified the Indians' fishing rights throughout the nation, thus contributing to the legal basis upon which Native Americans claim their share of the Klamath basin's salmon resource.

These developments underscore the need for direct consultation between state or federal officials and the leaders of the indigenous Klamath area Indian communities in shaping the basin's fisheries restoration program. The restoration program will strengthen the regions fish stocks and provide greater certainty to the annual allocation process.

The Solutions

ACTION: The Legislature should adopt Senate Joint Resolution 43 and do all else in its

"The State must adopt an overall plan for the conservation and restoration of the salmon and steelhead trout fisheries..."
